

# **BEXLEY FEDERATION OF ALLOTMENTS & LEISURE GARDENERS**

## ***A GUIDE TO ALLOTMENT WEEDS***



## **Weeds.**

The soil is full of weed seeds waiting for their chance and roots searching for an opportunity. They can't be eradicated without eradicating everything else, but they can be managed.

### ***Types of weed:***

**Perennials** come up year after year. Dandelion, thistle and dock have long taproots which go deep into the ground. Couch grass and bindweed have roots which will travel long distances to find space to grow.

**Annuals** grow, set seed and die in one season.

Within both categories are extremes. Brambles (blackberries which have got out of control) form tough shrubs. Chickweed grows and seeds so prolifically they feel more like perennials.

### ***Clearing an overgrown plot***

Take time to assess the site and clear any debris such as wooden frames and discarded glass.

Cut tall growth down to ground level. A petrol strimmer or brush cutter from a hire shop will make this easier.

Brambles send out tall arching stems some distance from the base. Where these touch the ground, they root and form a new plant. For a serious bramble problem, use a hedge trimmer to cut back the tall growth to get to the main clump.

*Work slowly and use protective clothing, a stone spun up by a strimmer can cause serious injury.*

### **Don't overdo it.**

There is no need to clear the entire plot at once. Go as far as you can and then create a 'weedbreak' by securing carpet or plastic across the plot. A covered strip about 6ft wide should work well against bramble incursion.

## **Next steps**

The options now are:

- ✓ Spray with weedkiller - it will probably take a number of applications to be prepared to re-spray three or four times. Check the instructions, some weedkillers are not suitable for land to be cultivated.
- ✓ Rotovate to dig the weeds into the ground. This cuts up the roots of perennial plants and each bit of root will grow to a new plant. It also brings buried weed seeds up to the surface to germinate. Rotovating each flush of new growth will eventually exhaust the weeds.
- ✓ Cover the ground with a light excluding mulch. Black plastic, cardboard and thick layers of newspaper are all suitable. Make sure they are held securely as even the heaviest mulching can be displaced on a windy day. Left on for at least one season will clear the ground of annuals. Once removed, any new growth can be dug out or hoed off.
- ✓ Double dig. Dig a trench the width and depth of a spade, removing every scrap of weed and weed root as you go. The soil dug from the first trench is set aside. Fork some well-rotted manure into the bottom of the trench. Start the next trench by turning the soil into the first trench, again removing every scrap of weed and weed root. Continue in like manner, using the soil set aside from the first trench to fill in the last trench.

Or any combination of the above, for example:

Decide how much of the plot you will have time to look after. Be realistic, it's better to have more time to look after crops than not enough.

Cover the area which will not be cultivated this year with black plastic or similar and make sure it is well secured.

The area to be cultivated can now be covered with temporary covering such as cardboard, newspaper or straw. It will still need to be held down but netting pegged over the area should suffice.

Strong growers such as potatoes, marrows and sweetcorn can be grown through holes made in the mulch.

Which leaves just the areas for roots (other than potatoes) and the more delicate growers such as peas and onions. These areas can be double dug to clear the weeds. Let the ground settle for at least two weeks before sowing and hoe or dig out any regrowth.

## ***Maintaining the plot***

Weeds will continue to grow and compete for water and nutrients.

Sow in straight rows so that it is easier to distinguish between weed seedlings and vegetable seedlings.

Hoe between the rows when the soil surface is dry. Keep the hoe sharp and leave the weeds on the surface to die off.

If the weeds get too large for hoeing, handpull or use a small fork to ease the weeds out.

Mulch around larger plants with a thick layer of grass clippings (do not use clippings if the lawn has been sprayed), straw or compost for hungry plants.

Dig out perennials with long taproots. Loosen the soil around the root with a fork and try and lift the entire plant out. If the root breaks it will regrow but the growth will be weaker. Fork out any new plants in the same way.

For perennials with travelling roots lift out as much of the root as possible. Any bit of root left behind will form a new plant so dig out any new growth with as much root as possible.

*Never put the roots of perennial weeds or weeds in flower into the compost bin.*